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Affirmation

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Concerns

Spring 1997 Volume 22 Number 1

Affirmation Council Meeting

January 18-20, 1997

Hard work and good ideas characterized the National Affirmation Council meeting January 18-20, as the future of Affirmation began to take shape. The contributions that Affirmation has made to each of our lives became the springboard for thinking about where Affirmation is going. Ideas flowed and several projects and directions emerged.

The mission statement and function of Affirmation became the starting point for reflection. Although Affirmation has served many of us as a support network, church and family, now many Reconciling Congregations and other churches are filling that need. Affirmation still pro-

Please turn to Page Two. . .

Affirmation's Spring Gathering

April 25-27 in Cincinnati, Ohio

The Spring meeting will be held in Cincinnati, Ohio, at the Clifton United Methodist Church. The main topic of discussion will be "The Rainbow of Gender." This was chosen for several reasons. It is one of the last issues to be seriously addressed by The United Methodist Church; transgendered issues are being included in many gay/lesbian and bisexual events; and this was the main topic in the last issue of Open Hands.

Some of the issues to be addressed include looking at gender roles, issues of sissies and tomboys, identity, clothing, what is malness/masculinity, femaleness/feminity, androgyny. How do these play a part in people's lives and in their congregations? In many of our congregations, which are reconciled or gay-friendly, there are transgendered persons, but have their needs been addressed or met?

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Among the Items In This Issue

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Theology vs. Practice: Baptism & Membership
by W. Alison Flint, M.Div., Ph.D.

Affirmation Spring Gathering

APRIL 25-27, 1997

Cincinnati, Ohio

WATCH YOUR MAIL FOR DETAILS!

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BY:

Council Meeting, from Page 1: vides support for those who are in isolated situations but predominantly Affirmation is now an advocacy organization that provides the prophetic voice to the church.

Morris Floyd provided an excellent talking paper, out of which came a proposed mission statement: "Affirmation educates and advocates within The United Methodist Church to seek full inclusion of gay, bisexual, lesbian and transgender (GBLT) people at all levels of the church's mission and ministry." Jeanne Knepper was commissioned to refine the language and bring it to the April meeting in Ohio for consideration.

General Conference activities of Affirmation, Reconciling Congregations and Methodist Federation for Social Action wove themselves perfectly together. God's guidance was clearly present. We were reminded that God's guidance and good planning go together so we will initiate a planning process with RCP and MFSA, the Women's Caucus and perhaps the Ministers with Disabilities group to be a unified presence at the next General Conference.

A survey of bishops will be drafted to determine how many bishops support (GBLT) clergy, holy unions, civil rights, etc. We may be able to provide information to them that they would like to know, and educate them by means of intelligent questions and educational materials from P-FLAG, AIDS materials, etc. The bishops will be added to the mailing list of the newsletter so that educational materials will go to them on a regular basis. There was a need expressed for a booklet that listed all the General Conference and Judicial Council rulings related to GBLT issues with an analysis of their implications.

The budget and nominations were the focus of the rest of the meeting. Affirmation came out in the black on General Conference costs. This coming quadrennium will require ongoing fund raising to keep the advocacy work building from now until the next General Conference. The final budget will be presented and approved at the April meeting.

Extensive attention was given to nominations for regional and at large positions. Once nominated persons for the National Council are contacted, a ballot will be sent out to members for their vote.

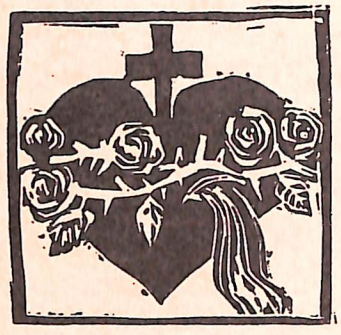
The program for the April 25-27 meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio, will address the "Rainbow of Gender." Issues of maleness/femaleness, transgenered, and dual-gendered people will be part of our discussion. It will undoubtedly be an enlightening program. This meeting is open to all Affirmation members, supporters and friends. ∇

Spring Meeting, from Page 1:

On the Saturday evening those present will have the unique opportunity to arrive at the Banquet/Ball in fantasy clothing. Entittled "Come As Your Aren't", the committee encourages each person to bring clothing to accentuarte this fantasy.

Time will be provided for a "safe place," when questions can be asked of transgenered persons, questions which most people have never had the opportuniy to ask anyone else, without judgment. Trans genered people (either pre or post-operative), very much like bisexuals, have been misunderstood by gays and lesbians as well as heterosexuals.

This promises to be a wonderful meeting and it is hoped that there will be a large attendance. ∇



Claiming the Promise

The Reconciling Congregation Program literature for Church School classes, or informal classes, is now available. After a year of proofing and editing, the literature is out and available for ordering.

Several denominations have joined together in studying this literature and have found it to be highly useful and effective. Each congregation or class is strongly encouraged to take advantage of this information as soon as possible.

The cost of the study book is $5.95 (10 or more copies @ $4.50 each) and the leader's guide is $9.95. To order, write to the Reconciling Congregation Program, 3801 N. Keeler Ave., Chicago, IL 60641. Or call them at (312) 736-5526. ∇

Affirmation Emphasizes Southeast

The largest region of United Methodist Church membership is in the southeastern United States (Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky). The lowest number of Affirmation members is in those nine states.

Your Affirmation Council decided to do something about that—and we need your help. Would your friends in the southeast be interested in Affirmation? We'll send a couple of newsletters. Better yet, would anyone want to be an Affirmation local contact person or start a chapter?

Both Affirmation Council members from the southeast are available to support this effort—William Flint in Jackson [redacted] or Mark Wilson in Atlanta [redacted]—as is our long-time regional organizer in Richmond, Clarence R. Norment [redacted].

Also, we have a special mailing address for the southeast region: Affirmation, [redacted] Jackson, MS [redacted].

And, our October 1997 gathering will be in Nashville!

Working together we can support our fellow Christians in their personal situations and in their efforts to move the big conservative church conferences. In the long run, support for gay/lesbian/bisexual-positive efforts in the southeast region can help open the hearts and minds of more members of the largest delegations to General Conference to support our issues. ∇

The Affirmation Council

T-Shirts T-Shirts T-Shirts T-Shirts T-Shirts

The Affirmation storeroom is running over with T-Shirts!!!
YOU can help us clean house and help Affirmation's efforts all at the same time.
All for only $5.00 each!
On the front is the Affirmation logo and
". . .And Grace Will Lead Us Home!"
On the back, the outline of a church around
"Is Grace at Home?"
White, red, blue, green, yellow & maroon
Sizes: L, XL, XXL, XXXL (some sizes/colors limited
[Please list several color/size choices]

T-Shirts T-Shirts T-Shirts

Meet Your Council

We have a number of gifted leaders serving on the National Council of Affirmation, who serve well and give of their time and talents in countless ways. During the coming months it will be my privilege to introduce you to a different council member in each quarterly newsletter.

During this quarter it is my great privilege to introduce you to Rev. Morris Floyd. Morris is an ordained clergy-person of The United Methodist Church who served in special appointments (in the California Pacific Conference) as an openly gay man beginning in 1984. He entered retired status from the appointment system in 1993 and is currently Vice President of a large health care organization in Minneapolis where he has lived for the past sixteen years.

Morris has been active in Affirmation since 1978. He has served as co-spokesperson for the Council during three periods of time (1984-88, 1990-92; and 1995-96).

Morris is a gifted preacher and a person of great vision. He shares very clearly Affirmation's vision of an all-inclusive church where everyone is loved, respected and accepted in the beloved. Morris has also given generously of his time and talents by serving on the board of directors of the Reconciling Congregation Program. In that capacity he has served as finance committee chair, and now program committee chair. It is clear from knowing Morris and serving with him on the National Council of Affirmation that we have a lot to be thankful for, having benefited from his gifted leadership and visionary direction. Thank you, Morris, for all you are doing to bring about the full realization of Peter's vision of a church where, as Peter said, "Truly I perceive that God show no partiality, but in every nation and tribe, ALL who honor God and do what is right are acceptable to God" (Acts 10:34-35).

Thank you for this opportunity to introduce this gifted leader, the Reverend Morris Floyd. ∇

Mark Wilson

Social Action Network Opens 90th Year

Addressing Issues of Violence, Sexuality, and Justice

The Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) Board of Directors marked the opening of the organization's 90th year by endorsing a statement of conscience and public dissent from the prohibition against UM clergy celebrating same-sex holy unions. MFSA is urging all UM clergy to consider signing "In All Things Charity," a statement released January 1 which affirms "appropriate liturgical support for covenantal commitments between same-gendered couples" and the ordination of qualified gay men and lesbians. "We joyfully join the 'Denver 15' bishops in breaking the silence about church regulations which deny the Spirit of Christ," said Federation executive George McClain.

". . . committed. . .to vigorous participation in the campaign to close the School of the Americas . . ."

Meeting in Pacific Palisades, California, January 9-12, the MFSA board also committed the organization to vigorous participation in the campaign to close the School of the Americas at Ft. Benning, Georgia, a U.S. military training center where numerous Latin American dictators and political assassins have been trained. The board commissioned Dr. George Baldwin to act as MFSA liaison with the School of the Americas Watch, which is leading the citizens' campaign to close the School. Baldwin is a former professor at St. Paul School of Theology who has taken a vow of poverty to work in solidarity with the poor.

The board also commissioned Dianne Roe, Corning, NY, to represent MFSA in the Christian Peacemakers Team (CPT) in Hebron, site of major conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Roe and other CPT members work for reconciliation opposing violence by such direct actions as standing atop Palestinian homes slated for demolition by the Israeli military.

"Aware that U.S. failure to pay its allotted share. . .is seriously crippling the peace mission of the United Nations . . ."

In another action, the board is urging United Methodists to act individually to pay their share of the U.S. government debt to the United Nations. Aware that U.S. failure to pay its allotted share of the UN budget is seriously crippling the peace mission of the United Nations, MFSA is urging concerned United Methodists to send to their congressperson a check for $7.00, written to the United Nations, asking that it be forwarded to the UN. "This action will serve to awaken members of Congress to the vast reservoir of support for the UN among United Methodists and other peace-loving Americans," said Dorothy Anderson of Mason City, IL, chair of MFSA's missional committee for global peace concerns.

MFSA made plans to give special attention to follow-up by general agencies of various actions taken by the 1996 General Conference. "In this time of reduced size of boards and agencies and of irresponsible criticism of the role of the United Methodist connection, we want to affirm the great mission of our church and assure implementation of the outstanding justice and peace actions by the 1996 General Conference," stated national co-president Mary Ann Haxton, West Sumner, Maine.

Among the 1996 General Conference actions singled out for such affirmation and monitoring are the Emphasis of Concern for the Worker; affirmation of the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity With Women; opposition to tobacco marketing, especially by Philip Morris and RJR Nabisco; action against racism and use of school nicknames demeaning to Native Americans; and "The Call for Truth, Fairness and Accuracy" in media coverage of the UMC.

". . .request the UM Publishing House to print the official homosexual study. . .in the other major languages. . ."

In one such follow-up action, the MFSA board voted to request the UM Publishing House to print the official homosexuality study, whose continued use was strongly encouraged by the 1996 General Conference, in the other major languages of the United Methodist Church, including Filipino, Spanish, Korean, Portuguese, French and German.

In a special ceremony at Holman UMC, Los Angeles, on January 11, MFSA presented three Lee and Mae Ball Awards for outstanding social action. Bishop Melvin Wheatley, Jr., accepted the award to the "Denver 15," the United Methodist bishops who publicly expressed their pain regarding the UM proscriptions against gay and lesbian persons in the

Please turn to Page Eleven.. . . .

In All Things Charity

Fifteen United Methodist clergy have written this statement in response to the decisions of the 1996 General Conference. They are circulating it to prompt discussion and to gather signatures from other United Methodist clergy. They intend to publicize the numbers and names of endorsers by Easter.

As United Methodist Clergy we are bound in covenant to uphold the *Discipline* of our denomination. By ordination we are also "committed to becoming conscious representatives of the whole Gospel and are responsible for transmission of the Gospel to the end that all the world may be saved," (¶330, #1, 1996 *Discipline*). There are times in history when those two expectations are in tension with one another.

In the face of the decisions of the General Conference of 1996 regarding homosexuality, we are moved to a statement of conscience and commitment. The classical ecumenical watchword, "In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity" challenges us and the Church to be both clear and gracious about our differences.

While faithfully presenting to our congregations and constituencies the positions of the denomination as adopted by the General Conference, we will also witness to the following:

1. Scripture, tradition, reason and experience convince us that "the practice of homosexuality" is not in itself "incompatible with Christian teaching."

2. The distinction between "being" and "practice" in our Social Principles gives rise to confusion. The statement in Paragraph 65 that homosexual persons are of "sacred worth" but that the "practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching" is not acceptable. One does not "practice" one's sexual orientation, one lives it.

3. We affirm appropriate liturgical support for covenantal commitments between same-gendered couples. The Church has called itself to be in ministry to all persons regardless of their sexual orientation. To withhold rituals of support and accountability for committed relationships is unconscionable. The standards for preparation and celebration of such services with same-gendered couples should be the same as for weddings of heterosexual couples. Standards of sexual morality and wholeness in relationship are not differentiated by gender or sexual orientation. Fidelity, mutuality, and the rejection of "all sexual expressions which damage or destroy the humanity God has given us as a birthright" (¶65g) are to be expected equally of all persons regardless of sexual orientation.

4. We will continue to initiate and respond to opportunities to enter into dialogue with those whose point of view on these matters is different from ours. We recognize the sincerity of those who hold other views as a matter of faith. While we do not agree with them, we insist on respect for other viewpoints. Such respect does not extend to tolerance for actions which demean or harm through exclusion or injury. We commit ourselves to resist such actions.

5. We will pray and work for the ordination of gay men and lesbians who are otherwise called to and qualified for ordained ministry.

6. In all other matters regarding homosexuality, we are committed to charity, grace, and accountability of the same character as applies to heterosexuality.

This statement is offered as an expression of conscience and commitment. We believe that public dissent from a teaching of the Church must be done only prayerfully and with humility. However, we also believe that when we are confronted with an injustice, we must not remain silent.

By God's grace we pray we may be able to forgive and be forgiven and move forward toward God's vision of a reconciled human family.

Clergy who would like to add their name to those signing this document are asked to send name, address, telephone , fax and e-mail numbers, annual conference, position, and the name of their congregation or agency, which will be listed for identification purposes only, to:

"In All Things Charity . . ."
c/o Broadway UM Church
3344 N. Broadway
Chicago, IL 60657
Fax: [redacted]
Telephone: [redacted]

Please indicate whether your name and position may be used in publicizing response to the document. ∇

Affirmation National Council

Richard Bates
Austin, TX
[redacted]

John R. Calhoun
Oklahoma City, OK
[redacted]

William Flint
Jackson, MS
[redacted]

Morris Floyd
Minneapolis, MN
[redacted]

David L. Gunnell
Evanston, IL
[redacted]

Judy Cara Hicks
Evanston, IL
[redacted]

Rick Huskey
Washington, DC
[redacted]

Alice Knotts
Hardin, MT
[redacted]

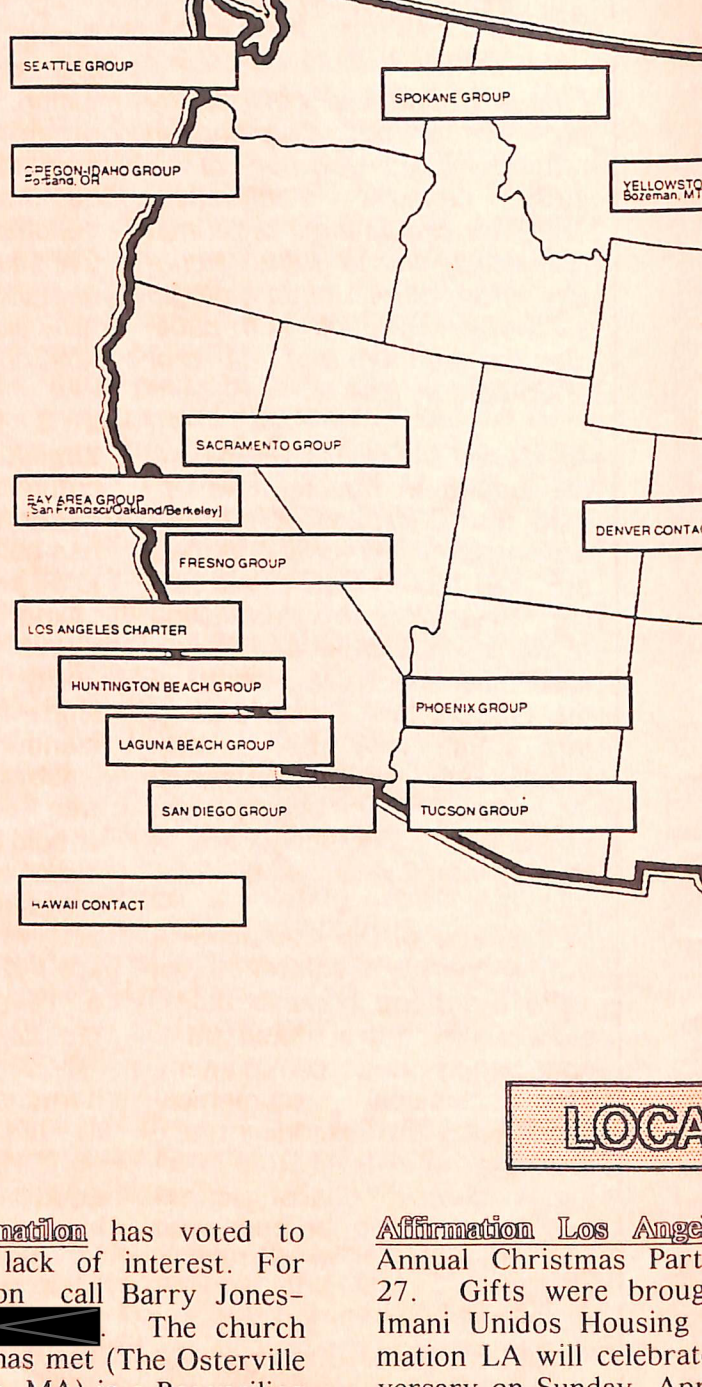
David W. Meredith
Cincinatti, OH
[redacted]

Paul Thompson
Studio City, CA
[redacted]

Mark Wilson
Atlanta, GA
[redacted]

Sam Wilson
Dallas, TX
[redacted]

One Woman
in New York



LOCA

Dallas Affirmation In November the group participated in an Interfaith celebration of Thanksgiving. In December, the annual Christmas service and Christmas party were combined into one evening. The group had a wonderful service celebrating the birth of Jesus followed by desserts and an evening of fellowship. The first General Meeting was held January 27, with new leaders and a discussion of Affirmation's future. Dallas Affirmation meets for a monthly pot luck dinner with fellowship and program every fourth Monday at 7:00 p.m., at Northaven UMC, 11211 Preston Road at Northhaven Road. For additilonal information write to [redacted] Dallas, TX [redacted] or call [redacted]

Cape Cod Affirmatilon has voted to disband, due to lack of interest. For further information call Barry Jones-Henry at [redacted]. The church where the group has met (The Osterville UMC in Osterville, MA) is a Reconciling Congregation.

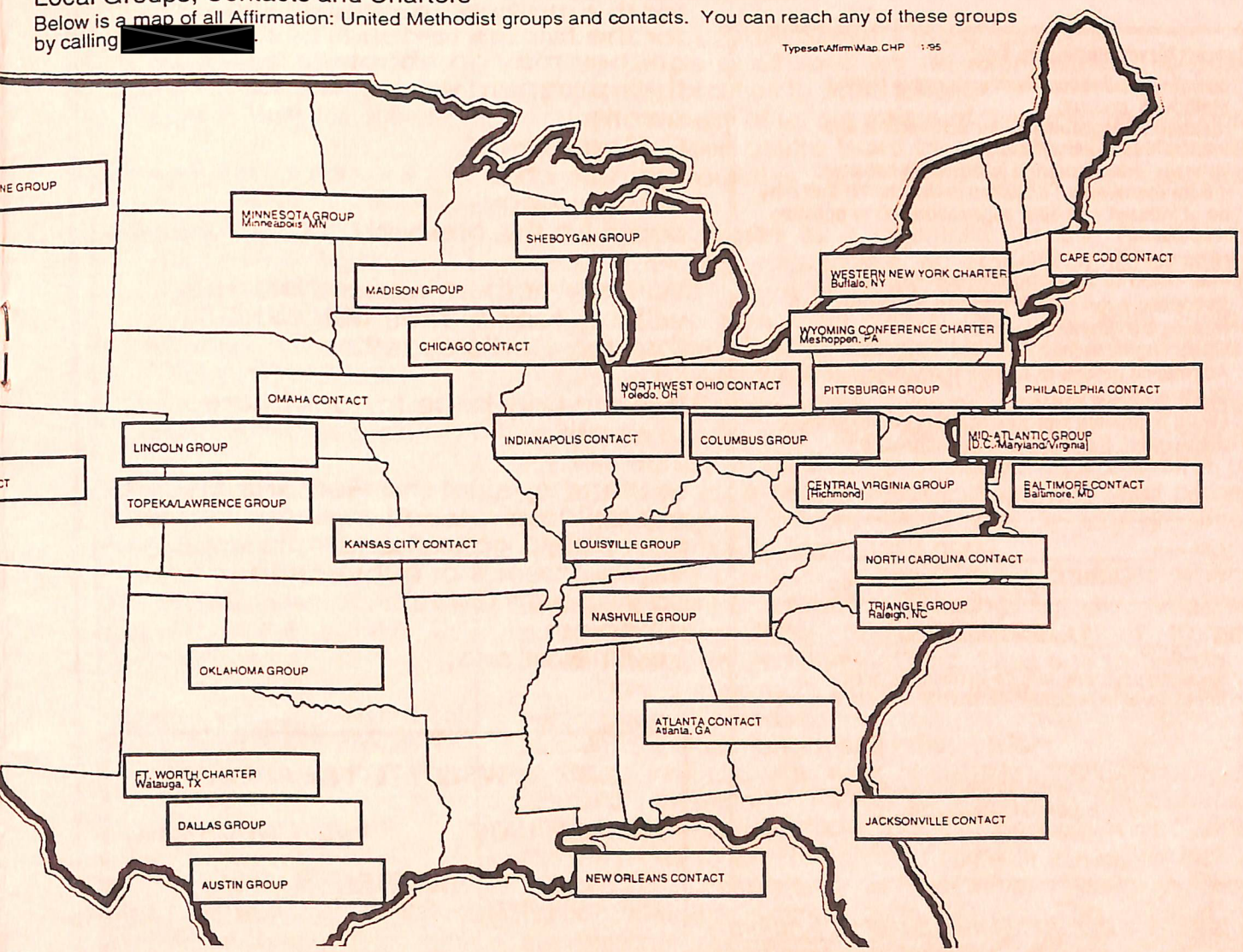
Nashville Affirmation Fifteen years ago Nashville Affirmation was born as an exciting consequence of being asked to host a National Affirmation Gathering. At that time there were very few other opportunities for lesbians and gay men, who claimed a faith/religious base, to meet, worship and work together. It was decided that conditions have changed and there is no longer a demand for an Affirmation group in Nashville. Effective

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Nashville Affirmation h
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All future inquiries and
should be directed to
Edgehill UMC, 1502
Nashville, TN 37212.

Local Groups, Contacts and Charters

Below is a map of all Affirmation: United Methodist groups and contacts. You can reach any of these groups by calling [redacted].



NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

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again be needed.
correspondence
Affirmation, c/o
Edgehill Ave.,

and fellowship at Holman UMC at 7:00 p.m. For more informatilon write to [redacted] West Hollywood, CA [redacted] or call [redacted].

Shalom Ministries On Saturday, October 5, 1996, friends and supporters of Shalom Ministries gathered at Lake Oswego UMC for a high-spirited evening of food, friends, fun and fund raising that raised nearly $900.00. Shalom Ministries presents *Building The Spirit III: Being a Reconciling Conference* on February 21-23, 1997, at the Collins Retreat Center. For more information about Shalom Ministries write to P.O. Box 66147, Portland, OR 97266 or call [redacted].

Please send a copy of your Newsletter or information about how, when and where your group meets. Be sure to include a contact person, address or phone number. You can send all information to Fritz Schultz, [redacted] San Francisco, CA [redacted].



Affirmation seeks to:

- coordinate advocacy with supportive United Methodist groups;
- respond to opportunities for ecumenical and interfaith witness and action;
- sponsor education and information services;
- inform members of activities in the church that may be of interest and offer suggestions as to possible responses.

I am interested in knowing more about:

- ❑ Becoming a member of national Affirmation and receive the quarterly newsletter.
- ❑ Upcoming national Affirmation Gatherings.
- ❑ Affirmation groups or events in my region or city.
- ❑ Starting a local group.
- ❑ I want to provide financial support for the work of Affirmation. Enclosed is a donation of $_____

Name_____

Street Address_____

City_____State___Zip_____

Phone _____Annual Conference_____

All Affirmaton correspondence is mailed discretely.
All contributions to national Affirmation are tax deductible.

Mail to:

Affirmation
United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, IL 60204.

Reprinted from the Jan. 1997 issue of Shalom to You, the newsletter of Shalom Ministries (used with permission):

SIMEON SPEAKS

A reflection on Luke 2:25-35

Will it mean anything?

Day after day,
called by a God I love,
but do not comprehend,
I take these old bones,
this sorrow-dimmed vision,
to the temple,
watching for the parents
who bring new-born babes
to God.
Waiting to speak a word
of hope,
of call,
of prophecy,
for the mothers to hear,
for the fathers to ponder,
so they may go about
their pregnant work
aware,
O God, aware,
that this child,
among many,
could be the Messiah.

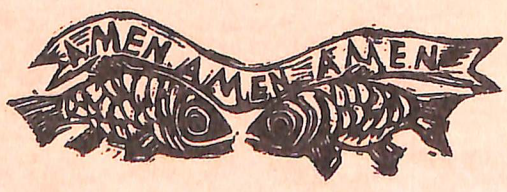
Will any of them remember,
will any look at their babies
through God's eyes?

It is my only hope for our future,
my calling.
Too old
to stand against the Romans myself,
my children raised long ago,
now daily I go to the temple
to plant seeds of subversion,
sowing with God
a harvest
I will never see.

1997 NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

DEADLINE DATE	PUBLICATION DATE
SUMMER	
May 15, 1997	June 15, 1997
FALL	
July 20, 1997	August 20, 1997
WINTER	
November 1, 1997	December 1, 1997

All submissions should be sent to:
George F. Hodgdon
Newsletter Editor
[redacted]
New Bedford, MA [redacted]



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David Gunnell, Chairperson
George F. Hodgdon, Editor

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Affirmation Newsletter is published quarterly and is mailed to every member of Affirmation.

The official views of Affirmation are stated by the Co-Spokespersons.

Opinions offered in signed columns, letters and articles are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

We reserve the right to edit or reject any material submitted for publication.

Please note: The illustrations in this issue are from the Clip-Art book "Block Prints for Sundays Cycles" by Helen Siegl, published by Pueblo Publishing Company, NY, NY.



From the Editor's Corner

A More Serious Persecution

Gay people of all sorts are no strangers to prejudice and even persecution to some extent.

But how many of us are aware of the great persecution (torture and even death) faced by our fellow Christians in Communist countries and those ruled by religious dictators?

We are indebted to a columnist for the New York Times, a Jew by the name of A. M. Rosenthal, for bringing this to our (and millions of others) attention.

He quotes from "The Lion's Den," by Nina Shea, director of the Puebla Program of Freedom House, (published by Broadman and Holman).

". . . The shocking untold story of our time is that more Christians have died this century simply for being Christians than in the first 19 centuries after the birth of Christ. *They have been persecuted and martyred before an unknowing, indifferent world and a largely silent Christian community " (emphasis ours).*

Nina Shea goes on to say "Eleven countries where Christians are currently enduring great religious persecution are China, Sudan, Pakistan, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, NIgeria, Cuba, Laos and Uzbekistan. . . . They evidence a worldwide trend of anti-Christian persecution based on two political ideologies—Communism and militant Islam."

Some will ask, why write about this in a lesbian, gay bisexual newsletter? Please refer back to the Summer 1996 issue and the article "Beyond Reconciliation?" and the reference to the Native American role of the *berdache.* In his book *Unrepentant, Self-Affirming, Practicing*, Gary David Comstock writes (page 87) ". . .The spiritual or connectional role of the ancestral *bordache* had three major characterisitics. . .(1) making 'special' contributions to the community; (2) helping other people; and (3) serving as 'go-betweens.'"

This clearly shows the relevancy. And to quote another writer:

"We can no longer just complain about others, forgetting about ourselves. We can no longer think that the world will change and our vision will be fulfilled without ourselves being changed and moved.

"That is what he [Christ] learned in the desert, and that is why he came out of it—himself changed—to shout to us: 'The time is ripe, the days are fulfilled, I overcame what holds you down. I could do it, you can do it. Change and believe this good news.'" From *Praying and Preaching the Sunday Gospel* by Joseph G. Donders, published by Orbis Books.

There is much that we, outcasts ourselves, can do to help other persecuted Christians—awaken our politicians in Washington; arouse the leaders of our own Church; stir up the people in our own congregations, make them all aware of what is going on. Or will we leave it to a few Jewish journalists and their religious leaders to carry on this fight? ∇

Openness to Difference

Theology Vs. Practice: Baptism & Membership

W. Alison Flint, M.Div., Ph.D.

The 1996 General Conference made changes in the way United Methodism defines membership. ¶ 215. The membership of a local United Methodist church shall include all baptized persons. ¶ 216 A baptized or professing member of any local United Methodist church is a member of the global United Methodist connection and a member of the church universal. ¶ 220 All members of Christ's universal church are called to share in the ministry which is committed to the whole church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, each member of The United Methodist Church is to be a servant of Christ on mission in the local and worldwide community.

Members of The United Methodist Church have the right to serve as officers and leaders within their local church. They have the right to serve in district, conference, and general offices and positions within The United Methodist Church. However, when it comes to serving in the Ordained Ministry of the Church, the rights of membership suddenly are revoked for particular classes of persons. ¶304.3 While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church. Then this statement follows in ¶ 310 Baptism is God's gift of unmerited grace through the Holy Spirit. It is an incorporation into Christ which marks the entrance of persons into the church and its ministry (Romans 6:3, 4, 18). There is thus a general ministry of all baptized Christians.

". . . Who is a Christian? Wesley wrote: 'Above all remembering that God is love, he is conformed to the same likeness. He is full of love to his neighbor . . . his love resembles that of him (God) whose mercy is over all his works.'"

The United Methodist Church has taken a dualistic stance both on the meaning of church membership and the rights of homosexual persons to be a part of that membership. On the one hand, homosexual persons are persons of sacred worth and are worthy of God's grace. (¶ 65.G) They are to be guaranteed their human and civil rights and liberties under the law. (¶ 66.H) On the other hand, as previously stated in ¶304.3 they can not serve in the ordained ministry of the Church, a right that all other members are guaranteed under The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 1996.

This paradoxical position leads one to question the entire theological basis on which the Church defines and practices baptism. At best the present practice itself is incompatible with the Church's understanding of God's grace. Looking beyond ¶ 62, *Our Doctrinal Standards and General Rules,* to the foundational basis in Wesley's understanding of grace and love, we find the following: "The Witness of Our Own Spirit" "By 'the grace of God' is sometimes to be understood that free love, that unmerited mercy, by which I, a sinner, through the merits of Christ am now reconciled to God. But in this place it rather means that power of God the Holy Ghost which 'worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure'. As soon as ever the grace of God (in the former sense, his pardoning love) is manifested to our soul, the grace of God (in the latter sense, the power of his Spirit) takes place therein. And now we can perform, through God, what to man was impossible. Now we can order our conversation aright. We can do all things in the light and power of that love, through Christ which strengtheneth us."[ii]

Wesley offered many statements to the centrality of love: "this we conceive to be no other than love: the love of God and of all mankind; the loving God with all our heart and soul and strength, as having first loved us, as the fountain of all the good we have received, and of all we ever hope to enjoy; and the loving every soul which God hath made, every man on earth, as our own soul."[iii]

In answer to the question, Who is a Christian? Wesley wrote: "Above all remembering that God is love, he is conformed to the same likeness. He is full of love to his neighbor; of universal love, not confined to one sect or party, not restrained to those who agree with him in opinions, or in outward modes of worship, or to those who are allied to him by

Please turn to Page Eleven

"Openness to Difference" from Page Ten . . .
blood or recommended by nearness of place. . . . But his love resembles that of him (God) whose mercy is over all his works."[iv]

United Methodism has always stood strong on the theological premise that the love of God stands in the center of all we say, think, and do. It appears that when it comes to the question of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons the Church loses its footing.

As we approach the Twenty-First Century and the Third Millennium begins we need to commit ourselves to finding the truth of which Jesus taught. Truth frees souls to live in the presence of God as brothers and sisters of Christ. There is no higher Family Value than that of following the commandments of God. Jesus stated: "There are no laws greater than that to love God and each other as God has loved you." Wesley understood the love of God to be the central most important fact in living life both in this world and the next. There was no other theme stronger than that in all that Wesley said and did. United Methodism will someday open the doors of the Church completely, without prohibitions, to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons because it is simply the Will of God to do so. We stand at the foot of the bridge to the Twenty-First Century, but more than that we stand at the foot of the Cross too.

This is the introductory article of a series of four that will deal with the meaning of baptism and church membership as United Methodism has historically practiced these two fundamental beliefs. Please feel free to respond to these articles by writing the author at [redacted] Jackson, MS [redacted] or Email to [redacted]

"Self-avowed practicing homosexual" is understood to mean that a person openly acknowledges to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry, or clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual. See Judicial Council Decisions 702, 708, 722, 725, 764.

[ii] *"The Witness of Our Own Spirit,"* §15, Works 1:309. Note also the quotation above from *"The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God."*

[iii] "An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," §2, Works 11:45.

[iv] *"A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity,"* §5 in Albert C. Outler, ed., John Wesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 184. ∇

MFSA from Page Four
church. Natalie Houghtby-Haddon accepted a posthumous award to the Rev. Richard Houghtby-Haddon, Los Angeles district superintendent who died suddenly last year. On hand to receive the other award was Mildred Hutchinson, the 102-year-old "mother of southern California social activists," of Los Angeles, California.

A special MFSA national assembly was set for the fall of 1997 to celebrate the first 90 years of the Methodist Federation. "Our Times Are In Your Hands" will be the theme of the event, to be held in the Baltimore-Washington Conference where MFSA was founded in 1907.

". . .draft a treaty banning the use. . .of antipersonnel mines."

The board authorized a letter to President Clinton urging him to assure U.S. participation in the Canada-led initiative to draft a treaty banning the use, export, production or stockpiling of antipersonnel mines. There are an estimated 110 million land mines in the soil of 64 countries. Most of the victims are civilians.

In other actions the Federation board voted to commend Emory University for its staff benefit policy which includes domestic partners regardless of gender and to give intensified support to the Episcopal Initiative on Children and Poverty.

Two new MFSA units were chartered by the board, a Chapter in the Virginia Conference, and a Chapter-in-Formation in the Northern New Jersey Conference.

Mary Ann Haxton, West Sumner, Maine, and Rev. Ulises Torres, Fitchburg, Mass., continue as Federation national presidents. ∇

Affirmation Council Elections

Members, watch your mailbox for ballots for Affirmation Council Members. This year, half the Council is elected by regional ballots. The newly elected Council members will be inaugurated at the April meeting in Cincinnati.

Regarding "In All Things Charity"

The following letter, addressed to United Methodist clergy, explains the background of the statement "In All Things Charity" found on Page Five of this newsletter, together with the names of the clergy who signed the original.

Dear Friends:

During the last days of General Conference in Denver last year, a few of us began talking about the possibility of a "statement of conscience" which United Methodist clergy who are so inclined could sign. Desiring that the sponsorship of such a statement should better reflect the diversity of our Church than a few persons could do along, they enlisted all of our participation in shaping and sponsoring the document.

We would like to ask you to do two things. First, consider signing the statement and sending us your name to add to the list of those who are willing to endorse it. Second, circulate the statement to other United Methodist clergy you know who might be willing to sign it and add their name to the list.

[The letter is addressed to clergy members; lay persons are asked to pass this along to their pastors and/or other clergy who might be supportive.]

Our intent is to publicize the initial number and name (where possible) of respondents by Easter. Our hope is that this statement will continue to be circulated as an educational document and as an opportunity for many to express their convictions on these matters.

Please note that the response requests among other information your position and the name of your agency or congregation. In every communication where names are used, that information will be clearly designated: "for identification purposes only."

Thank you for taking time to consider this. We look forward to your response.

Grace and Peace,

Gilbert H. Caldwell, Senior Pastor, St. Mark's United Methodist Church of Harlem, New York.

Minerva Carcaxo, Director of the Mexican-American Program, Perkins School of Theology, Dallas, Texas

Ignacio Castuera, Pastor, North Glendale United Methodist Church, Glendale, California

Susan P. Davies, Superintendent, Omaha District, Omaha, Nebraska

Gregory Dell, Pastor, Broadway United Methodist Church, Chicago, Illinois

Victor Paul Furnish, University Distinguished Professor of New Testament, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas

Sidney G. Hall III, Pastor, Trinity United Methodist Church, Austin, Texas

William A. Holmes, Minister of Preaching and Administration, Metropolitan Memorial The National United Methodist Church, Washington, D.C.

Takayuki Ishii, Pastor, Metropolitan-Duane United Methodist Church, New York, NY

George McClain, Executive Secretary, Methodist Federation for Social Action, Staten Island, New York.

Richard S. Parker, Pastor, Port Washington United Methodist Church, Port Washington, NY

Sharon Rhodes-Wickett, Senior Pastor, Westwood United Methodist Church, Los Angeles, CA

Tex Sample, Professor, St. Paul School of Theology, Kansas City, Missouri

Eugene Winkler, Senior Pastor, First United Methodist Church, Chicago, Illinois

J. Philip Wogaman, Senior Minister, Foundry United Methodist Church, Washington, D.C.

Further information on the statement may be obtained from any of the signers or by writing to "In All Things Charity," c/o Broadway United Methodist Church, 3344 N. Broadway, Chicago, IL 60657.

† † † Best Wishes for a Blessed Easter to All † † †